

## BOOK REVIEW

**State of the World 1987. A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward A Sustainable Society. Worldwatch Institute. 1987. W. W. Norton & Company, New York. 268 p. \$9.95 softcover.**

*State of the World 1987* is the fourth volume in a series produced by the Worldwatch Institute. These interdisciplinary, annual reports examine the "shifting constellation of issues" relating to global sustainability, focusing particularly on the interrelationships between economic, political, and ecological systems. Like its predecessors, the 1987 report delivers on the promise made by Lester Brown, the Institute's President, in the foreword to *State of the World 1984*: "to analyze not only the major developments and trends in [these] specific areas but also the way they relate to each other."

The current volume examines issues as diverse as the demographic trap facing many developing nations, the future of urbanization, nuclear power in the wake of the Chernobyl accident, the electrification of the Third World, the potential of recycling, raising agricultural productivity, stabilizing chemical cycles, and designing sustainable economies. If one theme resounds throughout, it is the urgent need to realize, and act within, the ecological limits which bound human activity. Using data provided by over 70 research institutes, as well as the U.S. government, the United Nations, and the World Bank, the authors warn that "the threats that emerge as we cross natural thresholds are no longer hypothetical. Already environmental deterioration and mounting external debt are combining to reduce living standards in scores of Third World countries . . . . Reversing these trends will not be easy."

A reversal in current trends is complicated by our incomplete understanding of many potentially catastrophic events, including the atmospheric buildup of carbon dioxide and trace gases, and the depletion of the ozone layer. Brown and senior researcher Edward Wolf write that this "counterpoint of urgency and uncertainty will dominate human affairs as the twentieth century draws to a close." Increased scientific research is needed to provide the information that will enable us to make wise decisions. But we delay action on critical initiatives, such as reducing carbon emissions, at great risk to ourselves and to future generations. Our "inability to recognize thresholds and predict when they will be breached makes efforts to relieve resource imbalance and environmental stresses all the more crucial."

An interdisciplinary approach characterizes *State of the World 1987*. Issues are examined within the complex framework of factors which characterize them. Thus, the demographic trap is discussed not only in terms of population numbers, but also in terms of diverging food and

income trends between the developed and developing nations, the growing rural landlessness which is fueled both by population growth and the concentration of land ownership, and the economic, ecological, and political stresses which accompany growing populations in many regions. Similarly, in assessing the future of urbanization, the authors examine the growth and role of cities, particularly in light of the effect of economic policies—long popular in Third World nations—which favor urban areas at the expense of rural areas. Additionally, they examine other important factors, including urban energy needs, the problems and opportunities associated with feeding urban populations and recycling wastes, the ecology and economics of city size, and the wisdom of seeking a balance between urban and rural areas.

*State of the World 1987* presents, in an easily accessible format, important information and statistics concerning pressing environmental issues, and is thus a useful reference. But because it is an integrated examination of selected issues, it is particularly useful for those persons responsible for formulating and implementing public policy at all levels. *State of the World 1987* draws as accurate a picture as possible of the present condition of the global environment and the direction in which we are heading with respect to various issues, and presents alternatives currently being developed or practiced which can help to achieve a sustainable society. For example, a discussion of successful recycling programs cites formal programs in the United States, Scandinavia, and West Germany, among others, and informal "programs," such as scavenging efforts in Bangkok, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Clearly, the *State of the World* reports are a valuable tool for policy makers and anyone with a vested interest in moving this earth toward a sustainable and sustaining society. Each successive volume reaches a larger audience. The 1987 volume appears in most of the world's major languages, including English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese. The Worldwatch Institute estimates that the worldwide market in all languages exceeds 200,000 copies. Moreover, approximately 200 colleges and universities in the United States have adopted the book for various courses. Given its interdisciplinary nature, *State of the World 1987* is well-suited for courses in the social sciences and environmental sciences, particularly at the graduate level. Teachers of undergraduate environmental science courses will want to use it to supplement their textbook, whereas those at the graduate level can use *State of the World 1987* as a primary text, supplementing it with readings on ecosystem dynamics.

Department of Zoology  
Miami University  
Oxford, OH 45056

DONALD G. KAUFMAN &  
CECILIA FRANZ